UNITED NATIONS

Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.
GENERAL

ICCD/COP(5)/3
20 August 2001

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
Fifth session
Geneva, 1-12 October 2001
Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

REVIEW OF THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT ON PROGRESS MADE BY AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Note by the secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its fourth session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) reviewed ICCD/COP(4)/3, on activities relating to the implementation of the Convention, which the secretariat had supported, or in which the secretariat had participated, during the period from September 1999 to June 2000. Similar information on measures undertaken or planned by the secretariat for the period from June 2000 to September 2001, and preliminary information to the end of 2001, is contained in the present document.

2. This note contains only limited information on the implementation process. It is meant as a modest complement of information in the context of the comprehensive assessment made by the Parties and by concerned international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the two sessions of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on the review of implementation. The first segment of the AHWG took place during the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 4) in Bonn, Germany, in December 2000, and the second segment during the inter-sessional meeting held from 19 March to 6 April 2001 in Bonn. This report spells out only those specific activities of the Parties to which the secretariat brought its contribution through financial and/or technical support and through participation.

3. In many respects the AHWG represents a milestone in the early stage of the implementation process of the UNCCD. Indeed it represents the Parties' collective assessment of constraints, challenges and possible responses to discharging more effectively the obligation of all Parties under this instrument. The conclusions and concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention made by the Parties reflect a consensus, as they call for measures well within the reach of existing development institutions. They should permit the Conference of the Parties to give appropriate guidance in order to overcome the difficulties that have been identified. The following paragraphs contain the secretariat's tentative conclusions on the review process, on the basis of the report of the AHWG contained in document ICCD/COP(4)/AHWG/3.

4. Affected developing country Parties and developed country Parties alike agree that they must more decisively take up the challenge of mainstreaming the UNCCD in existing sustainable development strategies while preserving the identity of the process. Policy coherence and a more coordinated approach by international institutions should consequently be promoted through multilateral forums. Coordination at country level is a key step in achieving the required level of programme integration and establishing the overdue consultative mechanism for the conclusion of partnership arrangements. The lack of progress in mobilizing resources for those countries which have completed their NAPs is indeed seen as a severe bottleneck which calls for the immediate attention of COP 5.

5. In this context, the resident coordinators of the United Nations and the bilateral "chefs de file" are expected to facilitate the conclusion of country-driven partnership arrangements that would also reflect the priorities and needs of natural resources, and land users at the local level. In the aftermath of the Declaration on Commitments adopted at COP 4, significant recommendations were made for increasing the provision of funding for national, subregional and regional action programmes, notably through the Global Environment Facility and the renewed commitments of the members of the Facilitation Committee of the Global Mechanism.

6. While an appeal was reiterated for assistance to complete the formulation of the NAPs and a call made to provide the national focal points with the assistance needed, the Parties did not ignore the relevance of subregional and regional cooperation. The role of the regional thematic networks and other regional activities was recognized and Parties agreed that they should be strengthened, since they can play a supportive role. Such networks and activities can also contribute in a decentralized manner to implementing CST-driven initiatives.

7. Given the comprehensive nature of the report of the AGW3 contained in ICCD/COP(4)/AGW3/6, the secretariat will not elaborate beyond these comments since the report contains the conclusions of the review process as initially requested by decision 11/COP.1, paragraph 19. Likewise, the information on synthesis by each subregion required by decision 9/COP.3, paragraph 24, is contained in Part III on key aspects and trends of presentations of the report of the AGW3.

8. The Executive Secretary of the Convention is aware that, together with the Managing Director of the Global Mechanism, he is requested by decision 9/COP.4, paragraph 24, to prepare a guide to help affected developing country Parties in the convening of a consultative process leading to the conclusion of partnership arrangements. It is deemed that such a guide will be of greater service to the Parties if it can benefit from a critical mass of initial experiences, from the results of the review of the AGW3 report by COP 5 and from the pending developments of the Global Environment Facility with regard to access to finance for land degradation. In the meantime, in conformity with paragraphs 19 and 20 of the said decision, the Executive Secretary reports that a number of measures have been launched by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to facilitate the conclusion of partnership agreements.

9. The consultative meeting on "Partnership Building and Resource Mobilization for the UNCCD Implementation in China, particularly in the western region" took place in Beijing from 8 to 10 June 2001 and included a field trip to Ningxia province. This was a joint undertaking of the Government of China, the Global Mechanism, the Asian Development Bank and the secretariat, and was meant to address, in the context of China's vast desertification challenge, some of the main issues raised at the AGW3. The meeting demonstrated a high level of preparation from the part of the central and provincial Chinese authorities and initiated a mechanism for a country-driven consultation process which would deal with some of the main issues identified at the AGW3, such as mainstreaming the NAP into established consultative channels and encouraging the developed country Parties to give a more structured response to the needs of the implementation process in China.

10. To respond to the reiterated call of the Parties for assistance in mainstreaming national initiatives and accelerating the required consultative partnership building process, the secretariat and the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP) of the European Union (EU) jointly organized, in April and May 2001, a series of workshops in Cotonou (Benin), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Apia (Samoa) and Kingston (Jamaica), to gather UNCCD focal points and national authorizing officers in the respective regions. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce priority UNCCD-related activities in the context of the implementation of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement. These meetings reviewed the combined challenges of desertification, drought and poverty eradication and spelled out options for concrete response strategies. The exchanges were thorough, fruitful and timely with the full participation of key decision-makers, so as to ensure that UNCCD implementation

measures will be moved gradually into broader development planning at the national and regional levels.

11. Activities at the national level aimed generally at assisting countries to face some of the difficulties in moving forward in the NAP process and initiating partnership arrangements. The second focus for support to affected country Parties continues to be regional cooperation and selected initiatives at the subregional level. Subregional programmes aim at fostering common interests and transboundary cooperation between neighbouring countries. Regional programmes could deliver effective services to Parties for information collection, capacity building, research and development and technology exchanges, notably through the flexible thematic programme networks which rely on existing institutions. Financial support for these activities has, however, become a pressing issue. Other activities have been undertaken through interregional programmes which seek to promote South-South dialogue and cooperation.

12. Another major focus of the secretariat's contribution in the period under review was the assistance provided to the implementation review process at logistical and substantive levels. In conformity with decision 1/COP.4, the secretariat was charged with the organization of the Ad Hoc Working Group's inter-sessional meeting on the subject of the in-depth review of the implementation process. The AHWG was convened during COP 4 and concluded its review with the inter-sessional meeting in March/April 2001. The preparation of country reports on the implementation process at the national level was assisted by the secretariat upon request.

13. The ratification of, and/or accession to, the Convention by countries which had not until then joined continues to be assisted as appropriate. The broad membership of the Convention that had reached 174 Parties by June 2001, including all developed countries, testifies to the relevance of the potential of this instrument to address desertification and land degradation issues under diverse climatic conditions and across a variety of ecosystems.

14. The call of the UNCCD for a more resolute involvement of civil society must also be translated into support for NGO activities. While it is understood that some resources are made available by the Global Mechanism to assist NGOs with relevant activities, the secretariat pursues its efforts to enable the NGO community to deliver their necessary contribution to the Conference of the Parties and to the implementation process at all levels.

15. In summary, the Parties have documented through the AHWG the substantive progress that has been accomplished by the Parties in formulating the frameworks for programme development at all levels. There is a broad expectation that the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties will need to define modalities for partnership arrangements to contribute to the sustainability of the efforts made by affected Parties at various levels.

II. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

National level

16. At the national level, given the fact that African country Parties are well advanced in the elaboration of their national action programmes, the secretariat concentrated much of its efforts on the facilitation of the implementation process, thus focusing on the consultative mechanisms that should lead to the required partnership agreements called for by the relevant provisions of the Convention. In addition, the secretariat also assisted those countries which are still in the process of formulating or finalizing their national action programmes.

17. The implementation process in Africa was reviewed in detail by the AHWG during COP 4 and at its inter-sessional meeting, on the basis of the national reports submitted by 42 African countries to the third Conference of the Parties.

18. Most African countries have organized national awareness-raising seminars, in some cases followed by national forums to launch officially the preparation of their national action programmes. In addition, a number of countries decided to achieve consensus and validation on their finalized national action programmes by holding a second national forum which often included informal consultations with development partners.

19. To date, 19 African countries have finalized and validated their national action programmes. These are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Nearly all these countries adopted the NAP officially through their respective governments. Furthermore, four countries are planning to finalize their national action programmes before the end of the year 2000.

20. So far, only a few countries have organized forums that focused on desertification activities, presenting priority programmes of the UNCCD national action programmes to development partners (Mali, 1999, Cape Verde, 2000). In countries where round table discussions did not take place, well-established partnership processes with bilateral and international development partners provided an opportunity for affected countries to introduce and integrate UNCCD national action programmes as a standing item of ongoing consultations and negotiations.

21. In the light of the above, the secretariat, together with the Global Mechanism, facilitated a meeting that aimed at identifying ways and means of enhancing the implementation of the Convention by integrating national action programmes into sustainable development strategies or, alternatively, launching consultative processes in affected countries. The meeting was held in Cotonou (Benin) in February 2000 and was attended by a dozen African national focal points from countries most advanced in the process of implementing their national action programmes, representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the UNCCD secretariat, and the Global Mechanism.

22. As a follow-up to this meeting, the UNCCD secretariat participated in joint missions with the Global Mechanism, UNDP/UNSO and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) to Tunisia (September 2000) and Morocco (November 2000), with the objective of further facilitating the implementation process by assisting countries

in the organization of consultative donor meetings. Other countries, such as Benin, Niger and Uganda, have also been assisted, upon request, in the launching of such consultative processes.

23. In a related development, and on the basis of a decision of the Executive Board of UNDP, the UNCCD secretariat and the Regional Bureau for Africa of UNDP signed a memorandum of understanding in April 2001 with the objective of jointly assisting African countries in the implementation of the Convention, specifically through the organization of donor consultations which will lead to partnership agreements. A tentative calendar for 2001 - 2003 was agreed upon.

24. In the reporting period, the UNCCD secretariat, together with the ACP secretariat, has facilitated two workshops in Africa on the integration of priority activities related to combating desertification into the country support strategies in the context of the implementation of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement (known as the "Cotonou Agreement"). The workshops were held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in April 2001, for the Eastern and Southern African countries, and in Cotonou (Benin) in May 2001, for the Western and Central African countries. The workshops were attended by UNCCD national focal points and their respective European Development Fund (EDF) national authorizing officers. Both workshops made it clear that a close collaboration between their respective institutions is of major importance in order to mainstream the NAP in national development strategies and to mobilize resources for its implementation. The UNCCD and ACP secretariats are jointly following up the recommendations resulting from these meetings.

25. The workshops were followed by a one-day consultative meeting on the review of the NAP implementation process in those countries that had already finalized and validated their NAPs. Participants formulated recommendations on measures to be taken at national and international levels to support the consultative process for partnership agreements with development partners.

26. The secretariat has also supported various countries in the organization of national awareness-raising seminars, national forums and activities aiming at strengthening the capacities of the national coordinating bodies in countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, the Republic of Congo, Togo and Tunisia. In the same context, the secretariat participated in a joint mission with Portugal to Mozambique in June 2001, aiming at supporting the implementation of the Convention at the national level.

Subregional level

27. At the subregional level, consultations aimed at elaborating and subsequently implementing subregional action programmes within the Africa region have been undertaken. In this context, it should be mentioned that the secretariat facilitated the participation of all focal points for the subregional action programmes (SRAPs) of African ACP countries in the above-mentioned meetings held in Addis Ababa and Cotonou. These meetings concluded that priority areas of the SRAPs should be integrated into the Regional Support Strategy and the Regional Indicative Programme, both elaborated in the context of the Cotonou Agreement.

28. In western Africa, where the SRAP is being coordinated jointly by the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), three out of eight thematic groups have up to now worked out a precise work programme within their specific area of cooperation: (1) Sustainable management of transboundary water resources; (2) information, training and communication; (3) control of crop pests, forest species and animal diseases. In addition, ECOWAS/CILSS organized a subregional workshop on exploring synergies between the Rio conventions which took place in October 2000 in Conakry (Guinea), with the support of the European Community and the technical assistance of the secretariat.

29. In Northern Africa, a set of priority projects within the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Maghreb were elaborated and submitted to various development partners for consideration by the Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). A subregional workshop on resource mobilization and partnership building for the implementation of the Convention in Northern African countries was organized by the Global Mechanism, in coordination with the UNCCD secretariat, in Algiers (Algeria), in October 2000.

30. Transboundary cooperation is another option for implementing the Convention at the subregional level. To date, ten transboundary pilot projects have been formulated with the support of the secretariat, the subregional organizations, UNDP and other interested partners, of which seven are currently under implementation. The specific objective of these projects is to enhance the management of shared natural resources in a more effective manner, and to create conditions conducive to local integrated management. The approach consists in strengthening cooperation through community-based pilot projects located in border areas under the responsibility of the community-based organizations (CBOs), and the supervision of UNDP offices in the countries concerned. This approach is being followed by several Maghreb and Sahel countries such as Senegal/Mauritania, Mali/Mauritania, Mali/Algeria, Mali/Burkina Faso, Algeria/Tunisia, Niger/Burkina Faso, Niger/Mali. The formulation of four additional projects is planned.

31. In southern Africa, where cooperation on the subregional level is coordinated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), emphasis has been placed on capacity building, institutional strengthening and networking as the main priority areas of activities within the framework of the subregional action programme. Progress has been made in the land degradation and desertification control programme as well as in the elaboration of concrete projects on early warning systems for desertification.

32. In eastern Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) organized, with the support of the secretariat, a subregional IGAD experts meeting on implementation of the NAPs and SRAP in October 2000, in Nairobi (Kenya). The meeting identified *inter alia* the issue of resource mobilization as the priority objective to be pursued, and IGAD was requested to strengthen further awareness at ministerial levels.

33. In October 2000, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism jointly organized a subregional workshop on resource mobilization for the UNCCD implementation for SADC and IGAD member countries. The main output from the workshop was a greater understanding of opportunities available and of synergies existing between bilateral and multilateral funding instruments.

34. In central Africa, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), acting on behalf of 10 countries (Burundi, Cameroun, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of the Congo), is assisting its member countries, upon request, as a follow-up to the workshop organized with assistance from the secretariat in June 2000, with the objective of promoting the implementation of UNCCD in the countries of this subregion.

Regional level

35. At the regional level, the secretariat organized, jointly with the government of Algeria, the fourth Regional Africa Conference in Algiers, Algeria, in October 2000. The participants reviewed the implementation process at national, subregional and regional level and adopted recommendations in view of the issues to be discussed at the fourth Conference of the Parties. The fifth Regional Conference of African focal points is scheduled to be held in August 2001 in Maputo, Mozambique.

36. Most of the six thematic focal points of the thematic programme networks (TPNs), appointed by the third Regional Africa Conference in 1999, started activities to make their respective TPNs operational:

- Integrated management of international river, lake and hydro geological basins (TPN1);
- Agroforestry and soil conservation (TPN2);
- Rational use of rangelands and development of fodder crops (TPN3);
- Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems (TPN4);
- Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies (TPN5);
- Sustainable agricultural farming systems (TPN6).

37. Pursuant to three consultative meetings held in Bonn, Germany, in March/April 2000, the regional coordination unit assisted the respective thematic focal points to organize two TPN launching meetings, in Accra, Ghana (TPN1) and Lomé, Togo (TPN2). Recommendations focused on the strengthening of information systems, capacity building, and technical and scientific cooperation as well as on institutional, regulatory and legislative aspects. The launch meeting of TPN3 is planned to be held before the end of 2001.

38. The Regional Coordination Unit for Africa, hosted by the African Development Bank (AfDB), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, undertook the following during the period under review:

- Support to three thematic institutional focal points in order to prepare the formal launching of the three TPNs and subsequently to implement recommendations adopted by the meetings;

- Technical assistance to the fourth and fifth Africa Regional Conferences;

- One-day briefing session on implementation of the Convention for AfDB staff, April 2001, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire;

- Facilitation of inter-agency coordination in Africa and mainstreaming of issues related to the Convention;

- Development of a monthly newsletter for the Regional Coordination Unit;

- Facilitation of communication between the secretariat and the relevant African regional and subregional institutions as well as the African countries;

- Representation of the UNCCD in subregional and regional meetings such as those organized by the Sahelo-Saharian Community (CEN-SAD) and the African Development Bank;

- Elaboration of joint work plans with various specialized institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Institute for Training (UNITAR), the Observatory of the Sahara and the Sahel (OSS), and the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (RENEDA).

III. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN ASIA

National level

39. At the national level, owing to the fact that Asian country Parties were requested to prepare their national reports to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth session, the secretariat concentrated much of its efforts on assisting countries in meeting their obligations. Thirty reports were submitted by countries, of which 20 had received financial assistance for the reporting exercise.

40. To date, nine Asian countries have adopted their national action programmes, namely China, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Yemen. All other Asian countries are currently engaged in the process of preparing their national action programmes, while Turkmenistan continued with the implementation of its NAP. It is expected that Kazakhstan will complete the preparation of its NAP by the end of 2001.

41. In 2000 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan continued to implement projects aimed at strengthening the role of national focal points. Yemen, after having finalized and adopted its NAP, is currently exploring the possibility of convening a round table for its implementation. UNDP/UNSO is providing direct support to affected countries in western Asia.

42. As mentioned in paragraph 10 above, a coordination meeting for partnership building and resource mobilization for the UNCCD implementation in China took place in Beijing from 6 to 10 June 2001. The meeting represented the initiation of a dialogue with donor governments and international organizations about supporting China in the implementation of its NAP. The meeting also represented a team effort, including the Global Mechanism, the UNCCD secretariat and the Chinese counterpart organizations, namely, the China National Committee to Implement the CCD, the State Forestry Administration, with assistance from UNDP and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

43. The secretariat participated in activities of the Asian Development Bank with a view to facilitating the Bank's support for the preparation and implementation of NAPs. Likewise, contact was made with the relevant UNDP offices at Headquarters level in order to discuss and explore ways and means of facilitating the necessary technical assistance to Asian countries at national, subregional and regional levels.

44. A meeting on synergistic implementation of environmental conventions took place from 18 to 20 June 2001, in Mongolia. The meeting aimed at mobilizing public support and people's involvement in combating desertification in Mongolia and at strengthening the capacities of local stakeholders to address interlinked policy objectives. The discussions aimed furthermore at giving an overview of the national efforts to facilitate the implementation of the UNCCD and other interlinked multilateral conventions, as well as assessing types of multiple-purpose field projects. Proposals on participatory agro-forestry and soil conservation in dry land communities, integrated land based resources management and nature reserves in dry zones were discussed.

Subregional level

45. Subregional meetings were convened to support the preparation of national reports. Subregional organizations were involved in the process.

46. A meeting and a "dialogue/training workshop" on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin were held in Kazakhstan in the first half of 2001 with the support of Germany. A meeting on the role of NGOs from Central Asia in preparation of the SRAP will be organized in September 2001 in Uzbekistan. The secretariat will participate in July 2001 in a meeting in Tajikistan on the preparation of the projects on combating desertification within the framework of the Regional Environmental Action Plan (REAP) for Central Asia and will contribute to the integration of the SRAP in the REAP activities.

47. The secretariat participated in activities relating to the subregional action programme for Western Asia during the Ad Hoc Working Group. As a follow-up to the endorsement of the Western Asian SRAP in Dubai in 2000, project proposals were submitted to the SRAP coordinator and reviewed accordingly. It is foreseen, apart from pilot activities implemented in various countries, that an inventory of ongoing activities related to the Thematic Programme Networks of the Western Asian SRAP be established, namely an inventory on water resources management (TPN1) and an inventory on issues relating to vegetative cover (TPN2).

48. The secretariat fostered a subregional forum where Pacific island countries could review challenges and priority objectives relating to land degradation and drought. It successfully initiated exchanges and networking among the focal points of the subregions. As for ACP countries of the Pacific, the secretariat in joint cooperation with the ACP secretariat also organized a meeting between UNCCD focal points and EU national authorizing officers, so as to identify modalities for the integration of NAP activities into the Cotonou Agreement signed between the EU and the ACP countries. The meeting was held on 24 and 25 May 2001 in Apia, Samoa. Elements of a subregional initiative to support the Pacific island countries were reviewed and endorsed.

Regional level

49. The fourth Regional Asian Meeting of UNCCD national focal points in Asia took place in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, on 26 and 27 June 2001. The meeting was intended to encourage the sharing of information and the exchange of views, and to promote consensus, on salient issues of the UNCCD implementation in Asia. Discussions focused on issues such as the overall status of the UNCCD implementation in Asia, regional thematic programme networks (TPNs), subregional activities relevant to the UNCCD implementation, interregional collaboration between Asia and Africa for combating desertification, and preparation for COP 5.

50. The TPN3 on rangeland management and sand dune fixation was launched from 7 to 9 May 2001 in Yazd, Iran. The network is hosted by the Rangeland and Forest Organization of Iran. The commitment of the host country as the task manager of the regional network was recognized. So far, nine countries in the region have already officially expressed their interest in the network. Its objective is to improve the productivity of rangelands in arid and semi-arid regions.

51. After having officially launched TPN1 on monitoring and assessment in 1999, the secretariat is currently assisting the implementation of its programme of work. In order to facilitate the production of a meaningful desertification map, experts consultations are planned to take place which will aim at unifying the benchmarks and indicators within the Asian region. The long-term objective is to unify benchmarks and indicators all over the world.

52. In order to conform to the schedule of regional cooperation agreed upon by the Asian parties, the secretariat is also reviewing the preparatory steps of the three remaining TPNs whose themes cover water resources management (TPN4), strengthening capacities for drought impact management and desertification control (TPN5), and integrated local area development (TPN6). TPN 4, on water resources management for agriculture, is scheduled to be launched in November 2001 in Damascus, Syria. So far, ten countries have expressed their interest in the network by replying to the questionnaire jointly prepared by the Syrian host organization and the secretariat. ICARDA and ACSAD are also expected to play an active supporting role in addressing an issue which is of critical importance for the whole region. With regard to TPN 5 and TPN 6, Mongolia and Pakistan respectively will host those networks, as decided during COP 4. However, substantive preparation of the TPNs depends on the availability of financial resources.

53. The regional coordination unit (RCU) of Asia was set up at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations, and started its operation on 1 September 1999. A provisional agreement was reached between the UNCCD secretariat and ESCAP on the secondment of the regional coordinator. The secretariat is currently trying to secure further arrangements with potential organizations and Governments pending COP 5 decisions on the matter. In the meantime, the Government of China has contributed to the services of an expert to assist in the work of the Asia-RCU.

54. The Asia-RCU is now fully operational and its mandate includes, among other things:

(a) Assisting task managers and members of the TPNs to link their activities with the national action plans to combat desertification while providing inputs on capacity building, project preparation and monitoring;

(b) Assisting countries in the preparation of national reports and formulation of national action plans with regard to the UNCCD implementation;

(c) Liaising with other international and regional agencies/institutions related to UNCCD in order to ensure that the TPN activities have institutional synergies with other relevant initiatives;

(d) Playing a significant role in brokering efforts among relevant international organizations and inter-governmental bodies in the region for concerted action in addressing desertification issues in the region; and

(e) Providing support to policy coordination for natural resources management at the regional level and representing the UNCCD secretariat in meetings and conferences relevant to the UNCCD taking place in the region.

IV. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

National level

55. At the national level, all the countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region submitted their national reports to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth session, and the secretariat concentrated much of its efforts on assisting them to meet their obligations. Thirty national reports and two regional reports were presented, with the assistance of the secretariat, upon request.

56. An in-depth review of the reporting process took place during COP 4 and was extended to the AHWG inter-sessional meeting in Bonn in April 2001. All reporting country Parties prepared and submitted their relevant national level activities in the implementation of the UNCCD.

57. Assistance was granted in 2001 to the governments of Grenada, Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent for preparing national awareness seminars. In addition, the governments of Colombia, Suriname and Venezuela, which were scheduled to hold awareness raising seminars in 2000, did so in the course of 2001.

58. To date, seven countries of the region have adopted their national action programmes, namely Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. The secretariat has continued to encourage and assist, where possible, the preparation of these programmes in a number of countries, including Guatemala and Jamaica, which started their NAP processes during the first half of 2001. The secretariat also received requests for assistance from Paraguay and Honduras and is responding to them with the provision of expertise and information whenever resources are available.

59. The secretariat is involved in continuous discussions with authorities in Bolivia and Cuba for the organization of the first partnership meetings with relevant donor countries and/or agencies. The lack of adequate financial support has been the major impediment to the implementation process in the region. The secretariat has consulted with potential partners, including foundations. Unfortunately no positive results have so far been secured.

60. The secretariat also assisted Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador and Venezuela in organizing synergy workshops, demonstrating complementarities and inter-linkages among the Rio conventions. These workshops attracted the attention of relevant authorities, stakeholders and the donor community present in these countries, and aimed at finding new ways to make the implementations of the Rio agreements more effective, especially at the national level.

Subregional level

61. The development of the Grand Chaco subregional action programme was also supported. Steps are currently being taken to secure its future funding. The objective of the project is to develop a sustainable development programme for the region involving Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. The proposed activities have been based on the ecosystem approach and on natural resource management, with common demand-oriented activities among the participating countries. During the period under review, the secretariat sought closer cooperation with partners such as the Global Mechanism, UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Efforts are ongoing to increase cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank in the interest of greater support for implementation.

62. The development of the La Puna subregional action programme was also supported. Steps are currently being taken to secure funding. This programme is entering its operational phase aiming at the strengthening of capacities, education and awareness raising, the designing of an organizational framework at national and subregional level in order to harmonize policies and local participation, especially among indigenous communities. Efforts to interest regional and subregional financial agencies started during 2001.

Regional level

63. The UNEP regional office in Mexico hosts the regional coordination unit for Latin America and the Caribbean. The unit undertook the following tasks during the period under review:

(a) To install and operate a matrix node with complete Internet access, including a home page, electronic conferenc ng, electronic libraries, e-mail and access to other information networks;

(b) To develop an operational plan for the network;

(c) To provide technical assistance to the governments of Brazil, Chile and Mexico in the development of a standard methodology for quantifying key indicators of plant and animal biodiversity and to include them in a spatially distributed database of other physical, biological and socio-economic data related to the degradation of land in arid and semi-arid zones in collaboration with the Natural Heritage Institute;

(d) To prepare and negotiate the GEF project proposal Block "B" to develop an indicators model for dryland ecosystems in selected countries of Latin America;

(e) To provide technical assistance to governments of Central America under a project proposal related to the management and sustainable development of priority watersheds in the region including the prevention of land degradation;

(f) To provide technical assistance for the implementation of a programme for sustainable development of the Gran Chaco Americano; and

(g) To provide technical and logistical assistance to the sixth Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in San Salvador from 17 to 19 October 2000.

64. The secretariat continued with the publication of the news bulletin online, which is sent out through the Information Network on Desertification and Drought (DESELAC) to more than 700 subscribers consisting of national focal points, government authorities, NGOs, academic institutions and representatives of affected communities. Through DESELAC the secretariat has also supported countries in addressing their problems with regard to connecting to the network. During the course of the year, it is expected that the level of information transmitted through the network will be maintained.

65. In accordance with the secretariat's efforts to improve and expand DESELAC, a new comprehensive coverage pilot programme will start in Barbados, making the online bulletin available to all elementary and secondary schools in the country. From the experiences drawn from this project, similar programmes will be initiated in other countries of the region.

66. The seventh Regional Meeting was held in August 2001 in La Serena, Chile. Special attention was paid to issues such as the operative phase of national action programmes, the use of technological and scientific benchmarks and indicators, and how to ensure a timely NAP implementation. The meeting reviewed the use and implementation of traditional knowledge and horizontal cooperation that can be performed by interested Parties in the region.

V. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

National level

67. At the national level, Albania and Croatia became Parties to the UNCCD prior to COP 4, and Bulgaria has acceded since then. Some other Balkan countries and countries from Central and Eastern Europe may accede before COP 5. The secretariat organized several missions to these countries in order to sensitize decision makers to the opportunities offered by UNCCD.

68. Affected country Parties of the Northern Mediterranean and other European countries are at various stages of the elaboration of their national action programmes. Spain adopted the outline of its NAP in June 2000 in Murcia (Spain), and Greece approved its NAP in 2001. Romania has finalized the preparation of its NAP. Turkey is currently working with UNDP on the preparation of its NAP. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia continue, with financial assistance from the secretariat, the elaboration of their NAPs. Other countries also are at various stages of the implementation phase. Italy and Portugal are progressing with the implementation of their NAPs. The Republic of Moldova is now in the process of starting the implementation of its NAP.

69. Countries of Annex IV (Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Turkey) submitted to COP 4 their national reports as affected country Parties as well as a regional report prepared by the Italian Presidency of Annex IV. As requested by decision 1/COP.4 , they also participated in the in-depth review on the implementation process of the UNCCD and presented their reports to both sessions of the AHWG. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Moldova also submitted their national reports to COP 4 and presented them to the AHWG sessions.

Regional level

70. At the regional level of the group of Annex IV, the fifth ministerial meeting and a focal point meeting were held in Murcia (Spain), to prepare the reporting process to COP 4 and to adopt officially the final terms of reference (TOR) of the regional action programme (RAP). A joint meeting with focal points and NGOs in Murcia also discussed and approved the terms of reference of the RAP.

71. Furthermore, a focal point meeting was held in September 2000, in Brussels, in order to prepare for COP 4 and the presentation of the reports to the AHWG.

72. A meeting was also organized by the research directorate of the European Commission to present to focal points of the UNCCD the results of various concerted action programmes related to desertification issues. Discussions focused on how to integrate them into the framework of the Convention.

73. Two other focal points meetings were held during COP 4 and during the AHWG in April. In March 2001 in Ancona, Italy, the sixth ministerial meeting to transfer the Presidency of Annex IV from Italy to Greece was held and the work programme for the next two years was discussed. The first focal points meeting under the Greek Presidency was held in Athens in June 2001.

74. Further to decision 7/COP.3 on an additional regional implementation annex to the Convention for Central and Eastern Europe, Annex V for Central and Eastern Europe was adopted at COP 4 and will enter into force in September 2001. It is planned that a meeting for the country Parties to the Convention from Central and Eastern Europe, will be organized in September 2001, in Prague, Czech Republic.

VI. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION AT THE INTERREGIONAL LEVEL

75. The government of Mali, with support from the secretariat, organized the second African-Latin American and Caribbean Forum, held in March 2000 in Timbuktu and Bamako, Mali. Concrete offers on the exchange of experiences through training and workshops were made by more than 10 countries so as to enhance South-South cooperation and to implement the interregional platform adopted during the first forum held in Recife in 1998. In order to support this initiative, Venezuela announced a contribution of 1 million US$ to fund activities over a period of three years.

76. Since then, two of the planned activities have been implemented: the government of Portugal, jointly with the secretariat, organized two weeks training on combating soil degradation, in which eleven Portuguese speaking African experts participated, in August/September 2000 in Portugal. In addition, a tri-national meeting (Cuba, Venezuela, and Mali) on soil salinity was held in May 2001 in Cuba.

77. The third Asia-Africa Forum on Combating Desertification was held in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, from 21 to 25 June 2001 to review UNCCD implementation in both continents and to explore concrete measures for promoting UNCCD implementation through interregional collaboration. The third Forum was a follow-up to the first and second Forums which were held in Beijing, China, in August 1996 and Niamey, Niger, in 1997. At the third Forum, discussions were held on a variety of issues. These included NAP implementation, synergistic implementation of interlinked environmental conventions, early warning systems, interregional collaboration through regional thematic programme networks, capacity building and human resources development.

78. The preparation of an interregional action programme to combat desertification in countries of Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and Eastern Europe had still to be postponed because some Eastern European countries have yet to accede to the UNCCD. It is hoped that, as soon as countries have acceded to the Convention, the initiative will be revitalized.

79. A regional meeting of the Mediterranean NGOs was held in Murcia, Spain in mid-June to discuss and exchange views on the implementation of the Convention in annexes involving Mediterranean countries. The UNCCD secretariat also participated in the 4th meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee to promote cooperation between the UNCCD and Ramsar focal points and the identification of pilot projects in Mediterranean arid lands with Ramsar sites.

Annex

MAJOR NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL MEETINGS, HELD OR PLANNED, WITH SECRETARIAT INVOLVEMENT
June 2000 - December 2001

Africa

2000

29-31 May	Nairobi	Subregional workshop for IGAD and SADC member countries on procedures to access existing financial mechanisms (organized by GM in coordination with the UNCCD secretariat)
17-21 June	Brazzaville	National awareness raising days
19-21 June	N'Djamena	Technical consultation on the Lake Chad Basin Ecosystem GEF Project
26-28 June	N'Djamena	Meeting of central African UNCCD national focal points
30 June	Ouagadougou	Official launching of the national action programme to combat desertification
9-12 July	Nouakchott	National forum to launch the elaboration of the national action programme
September - December	Burundi	National awareness days
6-9 September	Niamey	National forum to validate the national action programme to combat desertification
26-27 September	Banjul	National forum to validate the national action programme to combat desertification
29-30 September	Praia	Donors consultative national forum
1-5 October	Conakry	Subregional meeting for Western Africa on synergies between Rio conventions
2-4 October	Mombasa	IGAD/SADC subregional workshop on resource mobilization
9-13 October	Nairobi	Subregional forum to facilitate the implementation of the IGAD SRAP
22-24 October	Algiers	Fourth Africa Regional Conference preparatory to COP 4
25-26 October	Algiers	North Africa subregional workshop on resource mobilization

21-22 November	Khartoum	IGAD Council of Ministers
23-24 November	Khartoum	IGAD 8th Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government
29 November-1 December	Accra	Regional launching meeting of the UNCCD Thematic Programme Network on integrated management of international river, lake and hydrological basins (TPN1) in Africa

2001

11-12 January	Niamey	First meeting of ministers in charge of the environment of States of the Sahelo-Saharian Community (CEN-SAD)
12-14 February	Khartoum	Third ordinary session of the conference of leaders and Heads of States of the Sahelo-Saharian Community (CEN-SAD)
25-26 April	Addis Ababa	Workshop on integration of UNCCD related activities in the ACP-EU Country Support Strategies in Eastern and Southern African countries
27 April	Addis Ababa	Consultation with selected countries from Eastern and Southern Africa to review NAP implementation
2-3 May	Cotonou	orkshop on integration of UNCCD related activities in the ACP-EU Country Support Strategies in Western and Central African countries
4 May	Cotonou	Consultation with selected countries from Western and Central Africa to review NAP implementation
21-25 May	Holguin (Cuba)	Tri-national meeting on soil salinization (Mali, Cuba and Venezuela)
13-15 June	Lome	Regional launching meeting of the UNCCD Thematic Programme Network on promotion of agroforestry and soil conservation (TPN 2) in Africa
15-16 June	Rabat	National forum to validate the national action programme to combat desertification
21-24 June	Ulan Bator	Third Asia-Africa forum on combating desertification

Planned

August	Bamako	National workshop on synergistic implementation of interlinked multilateral conventions on sustainable development
27-29 August	Maputo	Fifth Africa Regional Conference preparatory to COP 5

November	Nairobi	Regional launching meeting of the UNCCD Thematic Programme Network on rational use of rangelands and fodder crops (TPN 3) in Africa

Asia

2000

3-7 July	Beijing	GM/UNCCD Joint mission for the preparation of the Consultation Meeting on Partnership Building and Resource Mobilization
18-21 July	Bishkek	Ministerial meeting on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin
7 - 8 November	Bangkok	Third Asian focal points meeting
9 - 10 November	Bangkok	Workshop on resource mobilization for UNCCD implementation in Asia
20 December	Bonn	First meeting of the Working Group on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin

2001

28 March	Bonn	Western Asian SRAP Management Committee meeting
23-25 April	Almaty	Dialogue/training workshop on the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin
26-27 April	Almaty	Second meeting of the Working Group on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin
7-9 May	Yazd	Launching of Thematic Programme Network 3 on rangeland management for Asia
6-10 June	Beijing	Consultations on partnership building and resource mobilization
18 - 20 June	Ulan Bator	National forum on synergistic implementation of environmental conventions
21 - 25 June	Ulan Bator	Third Asia-Africa forum
26 - 27 June	Ulan Bator	Fourth Asian focal points meeting

Planned

23July-4 August	Tashkent	Training courses on strategic planning and projects management for Central Asian states
September	Tashkent	Meeting of NGOs from Central Asia on the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin
September	Geneva	Third meeting of the Working Group on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin
November	Beijing	TPN1 expert consultation on benchmark and indicators for monitoring and assessment
November	Damascus	Launching of TPN 4 on water resources for agriculture
December	Yazd	Thematic Programme Network 3 consultation on design and distribution of experimental plots and on women's participation in the TPN

Latin America and the Caribbean

2000

29 - 30 May	Cordoba	Gran Chaco Meeting
17-19 October	San Salvador	Sixth Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Conference preparatory to COP 4
24 October	San Salvador	Workshop on resource mobilization for the UNCCD implementation in LAC
18 December	Bonn	Meeting of the Regional Executive Committee, during COP 4

2001

8 February	Bahamas	Bahamas ratification of the UNCCD
3 April	Bonn	Meeting of the Regional Executive Committee
17-18 May	Havana	Regional NGO-RIOD meeting
21-24 May	Holguín (Cuba)	Tri-national meeting on soil salinization (Cuba, Mali and Venezuela)
28-29 May	Kingston (Jamaica)	Meeting on the integration of priorities activities related to the combating land degradation into ACP-EU countries support strategies
3-9 June	St. Vincent	National awareness seminar

10-16 June	Basseterre	National awareness seminar
17-22 June	St. Georges	National awareness seminar
21-22 June	Caracas	National awareness seminar
22-29 June	Castries	National awareness seminar

Planned

16-18 July	La Paz	Workshop on synergies at the national level
16-17 August	Bogota	Seventh Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Conference preparatory to COP 5
10-13 September	San Salvador	Workshop on synergies in Central America
September	Caracas	Meeting on watershed management
8 October	Geneva	Meeting of the Regional Executive Committee
November	Havana	Workshop on synergies at the national level

Northern Mediterranean and other European Countries

2000

15 - 16 June	Murcia	Fifth ministerial and focal point meetings of the Group of Annex IV
16 - 18 June	Murcia	Mediterranean NGOs conference on desertification
19 September	Brussels	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV
November	Brussels	Presentation by the European Commission, Special Directorate for Research, of the research activities on desertification in the Mediterranean
15 December	Bonn	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV at the occasion of COP 4

2001

16 March	Ancona	Sixth ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV
6 April	Bonn	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV at the occasion of the inter-sessional meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group
21 - 23 May	Sesimbra	Fourth meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee
18 June	Athens	Focal points meeting of Annex IV

Planned

3 - 4 September	Prague	Meeting of UNCCD country Parties from Central and Eastern Europe
November	Athens	First workshop of MEDRAP Concerted Action Programme
8 October	Geneva	Ministerial meeting of Annex IV

Interregional and other activities

2000

4-8 March	Timbuktu/ Bamako	Second Africa-Latin America and the Caribbean Forum on Combating Desertification
12-13 December	Bonn	Third Round Table of Parliamentarians

2001

21 - 25 June	Ulan Bator	Third Asia-Afro forum
9-10 October	Geneva	Fourth Round Table of Parliamentarians

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